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Musings of an Old Prairie Fairy

Preface

In the Bureau of Land Management, there has always been a friendly rivalry between Foresters (brush apes) and Range Conservationists (prairie fairies). The following series of ribald tales is told by one of the BLM's greatest story tellers. Known by his friends as "the judge," Keith Norris of Santa Fe has always had an audience for his tales of yesteryear. Keith was a former marine who graduated from Utah State in 1949 and came to work for BLM shortly after graduation. A long-time District Manager, Norris ended his BLM career in 1979 in Santa Fe where he was the Deputy State Director for Resources. He and his equally colorful wife "Gen," short for "General," live quietly (well not so quietly at times) in El Dorado, near Santa Fe. Keith continues to be a volunteer for BLM.

Rex Morgan, Sandy, Utah, and I graduated together at USAC (USU) in 1949. He always was a character and a delight to be around.

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Denver Federal Center
Bldg. 50, OC-521
P.O. Box 25047
Denver, CO 80225

One time in the 50's, several of us were attending a meeting in Salt Lake. It was getting toward Friday and we had had enough. At breakfast one morning, a cute little waitress came prancing over to take our orders. Rex looked up at her and said, "Hey, sis, will you rumple up your hair and nag us? We're getting homesick." (See Appendix for a list of Memorable Morganisms.)

Several of the old timers, when I joined BLM, used to talk about Mud Springs University. Seems this was a remnant of a CCC camp, out in the boondocks, between Price and Green River, Utah. College educated people, such as Mike Deming and Hugh Bryan, would use it for training the many excowboys and sheepmen who were District graziers.

On Saturday nite, part of this wild bunch used a Government vehicle and went to Price to see the sights. They all became quite liquored up. When they stopped at a stop sign a policeman was standing on the curb. One of the more boisterous rolled down a window and said, "Say, officer, can I shoot your pistol?" It cost them to get out of town.

In 1951, Don Moffat was moved from Kanab to Price as District Manager. He replaced a man that was really a lemon. One of our unpleasant discoveries was that "the lemon" had divided one whole grazing unit into allotments, but forgot one permittee. "The lemon" lucked out for years - several of the

permittees were Colorado sheepmen. Every year one or more would not come so there were enough allotments to go around. Not so for Don, the very first year of his reign they all decided to come.

In 1951 or 1952, the Marsings and Moniers (Price Sheepmen) took Don and I on a tour in the San Rafael Desert for 3-4 days. They wanted us to see, among other things, a rim of canyon country they could use only on snow with sheep. One evening, we were on a mesa and it narrowed down to about 30 feet near a spring. They said it was a great place to camp, even though the first drop was about 500 feet if you stepped off the rim. Don looked it over and said, "If you don't mind, lets go on a little way. I sometimes walk in my sleep."

Lowell Puckett, then State Director of Colorado, told me of an incident that happened to him when he worked for the General Land Office in Wyoming. He had good news for an applicant. The applicant had selected a place for his residence that was a small underpass in an abandoned railroad grade. The applicant had a rather crude house in this underpass made out of railroad ties. Lowell hammered on the door - no one answered. As he was walking back to his car, a fellow came along with a team and wagon. Lowell told the guy that he thought someone was home. The guy on the wagon said the guy that lived there was a little odd. He suggested that Lowell walk with him up on the railroad grade and back to the chimney sticking up through the underpass.

When they got to the chimney, Lowell shouted down the stovepipe and told his story. Lowell then went down and knocked on the door and received a nice greeting from the happy homesteader.

Puckett's work took him through a sugar beet area. He had heard that after harvest, and when a sugar beet was frozen, if you hit is just right with a car tire - the beet would really fly because of its conical shape. In those days, traffic was scant and Puckett would weave down the road aiming at frozen beets. Finally he said he hit one just right. He said it went about 150 feet and just like a bullet hit an abandoned building and caved in some boards. Puckett said that ended his rocket launching.

Having newly arrived in Fillmore, Utah, Pratt Allred was showing me grazing allotments on a map. Pratt was a great pipe and cigar smoker so it kept us busy knocking ashes off the map. The map had yellow for BLM, blue for State lands, and red for private lands. Allotment lines were brown. He pointed out several grazing allotments that had been split because of purchases, new owners, etc. I pointed to one that obviously was divided by a brown line but no changes in name, etc. Pratt gave me a big grin and said, "No, that was where I was pointing out something with my pipe stem one time. That is a pipe drool - not a line!"

Pratt had a crew working near Garrison, Utah, probably 80-90 miles from Fillmore. He and his crew had an old-fashioned radio hookup. Sometimes it worked, sometimes statics, beeps, rumbles, and squeaks was all that happened.

One day Pratt tried to get his Crew Chief, Foisey King, on the radio - radio reception was poor. Pratt kept saying, "Come in Foisey, come in Foisey." Pratt gave up and shut down the radio. About 2 p.m., Foisey walks in the office, "Here I am Pratt, I got part of your message."

Lynn Leishman and I had worked out an agreement between a sheepman and some cattlemen south of Beaver, Utah. It needed to be signed and a cooperative fence agreed to. So we met at the courthouse in Beaver, Utah.

I graduated with Lynn. He was a fine, honest, sober, hard working Mormon.

Alas, the sheepman and cattlemen decided to bicker some more and finally things got pretty warm. The room contained a sturdy table, like you find in a lot of courthouses. We were scattered around it. Finally a cowboy blew his top, got on his hands and knees on the table, put his face right up to the sheepman and said, "Hit me you S-O-B and I'll spit these false teeth right in your face."

Cooler heads prevailed and things settled down. On the way home, I asked Lynn what he would have done if the cowboy had done that to him. Lynn said, "I'd have clobbered him one."

We had to keep diaries years ago. As I recall, they quit requiring that in the mid-50's. Each month they would be mailed to the State Office, why I don't know. Dick Greenland, who used to be in the Utah SO, said they were interesting and rather humorous at times. One District Manager always described his arrival in a town in his District, other than his hometown, thusly, "Arrived in _____ at 6 p.m., obtained room at _____, ate, and gassed up." Dick could only conclude he had bad digestion.

When at Monticello, Nick Cozakos could get into more jams with a vehicle than anyone I ever supervised.

One day in early spring we were in a surplus military jeep heading down a wash west of Blanding, Utah, into a country Nick said I had to see. Water would run down the wash in the heat of the day and freeze. Rocks of various sizes were all over in the bed of the wash. I told him to turn around, I didn't like the looks of it - let's wait a month or two. He persisted and I told him if we got stuck, I wasn't going to help. He said fine - he was an excellent driver.

Sure enough, we dropped in a big hole and high centered the jeep on a rock. After an hour or so, Nick used the handyman jack and got the jeep out. I had built a fire because he was wet to the knees. A very interesting sight. Tight levi jacket, a levi shirt tail billowing out below it - levi pants off - long underwear bottoms off - anyway, still talking and pointing out landmarks, he managed to burn the toes out of his socks and the leg ends off his long underwear. We never did get to see what lay around the next bend.

Milo Deming was an interesting person, well educated, former Forest Supervisor - joined Grazing Service in early days.

He spent years coming up with a system of condition and trend. Anyway, it was a system that never worked. The Deming System used ratings and came up with a fraction; top part being condition, and the bottom part being trend. There was also an intensive and extensive method of doing it. Bill Malencik summed it up nicely. Bill said, "The big difference between the intensive and extensive Deming method is that you wash the windshield to use the intensive method!"

In about 1951, Malencik and I got to go to Squaw Butte, Oregon, for the BLM training they had there, but I recall that Max Bridge, J. Russell Penny, Tom Hall were there. Probably 30-40 BLM Range Conservationists altogether.

Anyway, someone told a story about three children who were finally told by their parents that they were born out of wedlock. The parents asked, "What do you think about that?" The three looked at each other and finally the smallest child said, "Why don't one of you bigger bastards speak up?"

Marion Clawson was Director and at the conclusion gave us a little talk. Finally, he said they were always ready for advice from the field to the Washington Office and for us to speak up. Everyone was quiet for a moment and looked at each other. Finally, I believe it was Larry Casey looked around and said, "Why don't one of you bigger bastards say something?"

I don't doubt if a young person starting now would see the tremendous changes in BLM that I saw during the 30-year period, 1949-1979.

When I started at Vernal, the office consisted of a District Manager, Secretary, and myself. We had a heavy equipment operator and one mechanic.

The subject of grazing fees has always been interesting. People studied it for years and always it was settled politically. Fees were 8 cents per AUM, when I started. I doubted that they would get over 50 cents per AUM during my tenure, but I got fooled. (An AUM is one cow grazing for 1 month.)

The status of women improved remarkably and justifiably so. The early day lady clerks in Utah really took a beating when the Bureau decided to get Administrative Assistants in each District. Despite District Manager protests, the ladies couldn't get the new higher paying jobs. We really got some bummers among the first Administrative Assistants. Things are much better now, but still more opportunity for women needs to be made in BLM.

I was impressed by the people BLM had as hourly wage employees. Some obtained permanent status. Many had about the same background as early day District Graziers, but for some reason didn't have the influence some others had. A few, I'm sure, were a little jealous of the "college boys" that came along.

Among those I was particularly impressed with were Fred Jewkes (Statewide in Colorado-Utah), Cal Jorgenson (Vernal), Howard Bennett and Nels Bogh (Fillmore), Paul Arns (Cedar City), Ed Foy and Aldie Newell (Moab).

Many were "ex" CCC Boys, WWII Seabees, and Engineers and graduates of the school of hardknocks. Whether it was well repair, road maintenance, maintenance of old equipment or whatever, they worked hard and long and were top notch employees. Real "make do" people. One time Nick Cozobos and Ed "Babe" Foy were stranded about 30 miles from town. "Babe" braided together the ends of a rope for a fan belt and it took them into Monticello.

Public demands increased during my tenure. Mineral production, recreation and public interest increased. The passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act in 1976 was a real milestone.

The fall of the sheep industry was a highlight. I doubt there is one sheep now where there was 20 when I started in 1949. To me this has not all been desirable. There are millions of acres in Utah and Nevada and elsewhere that were well adapted to sheep winter use that I believe will never make good cattle range.

I don't think one needed a very high I.Q. to see the time come when BLM would be held accountable for poor grazing management. It's true that private allotments helped some, but a lot of acreage needed a downward adjustment in use. I suppose a lot was politics, but the hens came home to roost when NRDC filed suit against the BLM. From 1954 to 1961 in Utah, one other DM and I were pecking away and getting some reductions - and drawing fire too.

One west side District, in Utah, had range surveys, excellent livestock counts, etc., but sat on their hands for years and did nothing to correct the over grazing. Right in the heart of one of their big grazing units was the Desert Range Experiment Station to show what was possible under good range management. The fence line contrast was really something to see between the public domain and the station lands.

The Craig District was much better. Some reductions had been made. It was a better natural range country. The area has high rainfall and the plants were more adaptable to the particular season of use needed. They had one grazing unit that was heavily over licensed near the Utah line. Warren Gray cut it 50 percent in 1941. We came back in 1965, and cut it again 10-35 percent by allotment. Bill Campbell, former Roswell District Manager and an early day District Manager in Craig, saw this area in about 1978. He told me he did not believe a country could change so much for the better.

I was always interested in western history wherever I was in BLM. Having been in the Vernal, Price, and Craig Districts one always ran into Butch Cassidy stories.

The Browns Park area in the Vernal and Craig Districts was a favorite stamping ground of Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. Robbers Roost in the Price District was another.

In 1949 and 1950, I was given the opportunity to meet people who were then old, but had known or seen Cassidy. A gentlemen in Vernal, named Jeff Hall, told us a few stories. People around there claimed he was truthful and I had no reason to doubt it.

He was raised on a small ranch, in a canyon, north of Vernal. His family had a spring house in which they kept milk, meat, cheese, etc. They also had a good string of horses. He said that quite often their spring house was raided and gold coins left. Horses were taken and worn out horses left. The worn ones were good blooded horses. Again, money was left. Six months to a year would pass and then the process would be repeated.

An interesting and outstanding Advisory Board Member, named Keith Smith, lived at Linwood, Utah. Linwood is now under water at Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were really class people. They were probably in their late 70's in age. Keith was a graduate of an Ivy League University.

Keith, his brother, and father came out to the area before the turn of the century to hunt and fish. They liked the area, bought some land, and homesteaded. They raised sheep and cattle, but mostly sheep. They built big barges at Green River and floated items down the river to Linwood. Then they used the barge lumber for part of their buildings.

He related that around 1900 he was passing from the bunkhouse to his home about sundown. Two riders passed and dismounted at the bunkhouse. One was medium in height, the other cowboy was shorter and stockier. He was particularly impressed with their horses. They seemed to be thoroughbreds and were far above the caliber of horses most ranchers had in the area.

The next morning he stopped at the cook shack to consult with his foreman. Looking at the dozen or so men that were eating, he failed to see the riders from the night before. He told the foreman that all visitors were welcome and asked where were the two strangers. The foreman replied that they had left before day break. In reply to the question - who were they - the foreman grinned and said the taller one was Elza Lay. The shorter one was Butch Cassidy.

When the Wild Bunch held up the train at Castlegate, Utah, near Helper, they apparently used three relays of horses. I have been shown the spot east of Castledale, Utah, in the Buckhorn Flat, Cedar Mountain area, where they first changed horses. The next relay was near the Black Dragon Canyon in the San Rafael Swell, then on to the Robber's Roost. I understand that the goal was to make 100 miles in 12 hours. That's alot of pounding!

Of course, there were many that were just plain killers wandering around. One was Harry Tracy, who a posse cornered in Browns Park. Old man Foy thought he could talk him out of a large broken pile of rocks. Tracy shot him, but was later killed in a wheat field in Oregon.

You are probably tired of this malarkey by now, so I'll close. What can you expect from a fellow who in 1951 was with a F&WS man in the San Rafael Desert and helped shoot wild horses and load them up with 1080 poison for coyote control!

APPENDIX
Memorable Morganisms

This is a partial list of famous witty sayings attributed to Rex Morgan, a colorful BLM Manager of the 50's and 60's. The list was compiled by the Susanville District staff on December 4, 1970.

As nervous as a grasshopper in a hen house	Self explanatory
A brief overview.	A long-winded briefing
As pushed out of shape as a pregnant belly dancer.	Really bad shape
As wrong as a worm on a wax apple	Really wrong
As welcome as a coyote in a hen house	Completely unwanted
Barnacles scraped off his bicuspids	Had teeth cleaned
Battery acid.	Coffee
Bean in the oven.	Pregnant
Big, sweaty blonde.	A sexy woman
Brush apes.	Foresters
Butcher shop.	Hospital
Can of worms.	A real mess
Cooperate yourself out of a place at the table	Cooperating with another employee who is trying for your job behind your back.
Morganized.	Cheated when you weren't looking.
Morgan Horse.	One with every other tooth missing.
Nervous as a whore in church.	Really nervous
Off his feed.	Under the weather or sick.
Overtrained	Sick from imbibing

Picked green.	Lacks common sense
Pissed in your whiskey.	Did you wrong
Prairie Fairy	Range Con
Pushing a wet noodle up a wild cat's ass	An impossible task
Rode hard and put away wet.	In tough shape
She took seriously what was poked at her in fun.	Pregnant again!
Snorting a heifer in the flanks	Trying to make out
Split the sheets.	Divorced
Sweaty saddle blanket	A soggy pancake
Take an "LBJ"	A large bowel movement
That makes sense if you don't think about it too long	An off the wall idea
Tittle-late your apathy	Arouse your interest
Crawled in bed with	Went over to another's way of thinking
Croacker	Doctor
Swindle bag	Briefcase
Cut a heifer out of the herd.	Make out
Ditty bag	Small briefcase
E-We.	Female sheep
Every Swinging Dude	Every man
Fence mending	A conciliatory gesture
Come in fresh	Give birth
Greasy-sack outfit.	A real cheap outfit
Pissed backwards.	Didn't do what he had agreed to.
He squats to squizzle	Effeminate

Hinder binder . . . . . Constipating

If you'd put a band-aid on it and give
it a little tender loving care, it would
get up and walk away. . . . . The steak is too raw

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